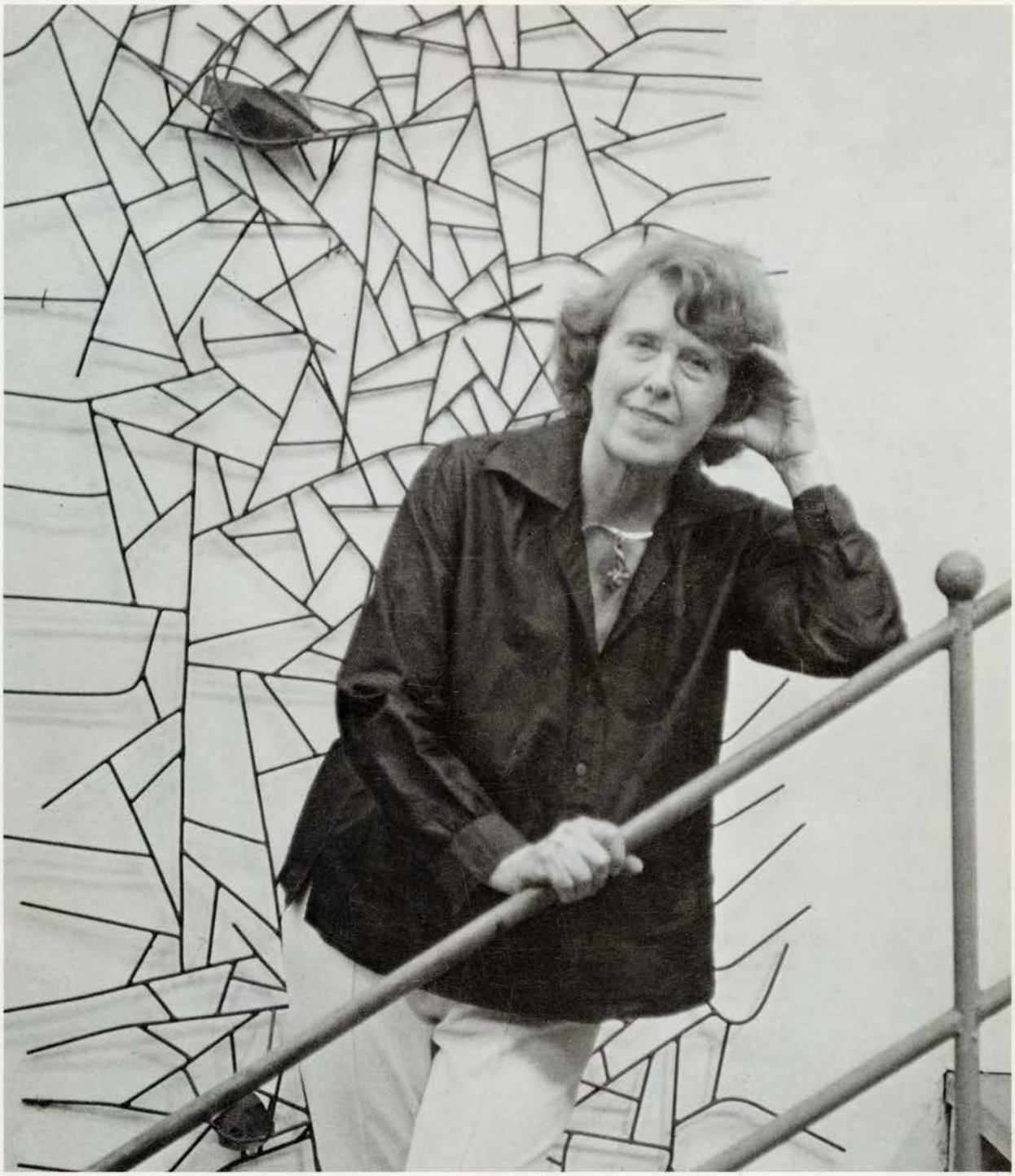

The Continuing Vision of Claire Falkenstein, 1947-1984

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September 28 – October 26, 1984
University Art Gallery
University of California, Riverside

Cover photograph: Claire Falkenstein
in her studio, August 1984
Venice, California

Acknowledgements

It is a great honor for the University Art Gallery to present this exhibition of work by Claire Falkenstein.

Working with Claire provided a stimulating and enlightening glimpse of a true creative genius for all those who worked with her during the preparation of the exhibition.

Originally sugggested by Professor Dericksen Brinkerhoff, Chair of the University of California, Riverside Department of Art History, as a show of Claire's drawings, the exhibition has become far larger, encompassing a significant portion of the artist's *oeuvre*. During the time the exhibition was in preparation, Claire, indomitable Claire, suffered a broken hip and elbow. The experience seems only to have made her stronger and more productive. She contributed an enormous amount of time and energy for the exhibition, as well as generously loaning all the works displayed. Her vision does indeed continue; it expands constantly outward with increasing velocity.

The introductory essay is by Dr. Wendy Slatkin, visiting lecturer in the UCR Department of Art History, who curated the exhibition.

Maren Henderson, who wrote the title essay, conducted extensive research on Claire Falkenstein for a dissertation, now in progress, sponsored by the Department of Art, Design and Art History at UCLA. Ms. Henderson teaches the history of art at California Polytechnic, Pomona. Her essay places Falkenstein's work within the framework of art in the twentieth century.

Individual catalogue entries are by both Dr. Slatkin and graduate students from the UCR Department of Art History who participated in the preparation of this catalogue. Their incisive, thoughtful essays bring greater comprehension to the work displayed, and are based on both research and personal interviews with Claire Falkenstein. A set of initials follows each entry indicating its author. The students are: Pamela Blackwell, Vicki France, Dana Haywood, Karen Huffman, and Elizabeth Lopez. Danielle Nathanson, also a graduate student in Art History, was involved in the selection and preliminary arrangement of the exhibition.

Very special thanks must be extended to Pamela Blackwell, who donated countless hours of her time and professional services photographing the individual pieces for this catalogue. Dan Meinwald, who edited the text, deserves a most grateful appreciation for his patience and persistence.

Thanks must also be expressed to the following for their cooperation and contributions: the UCR Department of Art History, particularly, Administrative Assistant Sue Carter; Robert Mayhew in the UCR Academic Computing Center; UAG preparator John Dingler; and the William & Catherine Hemmerdinger Gallery, Palm Desert, California. Finally, sincere gratitude is extended to the UCR College of Humanities & Social Sciences which provided financial support for this catalogue.

Katherine Diage
Director, University Art Gallery

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The Art of Claire Falkenstein: A Conceptual Overview

The works in this exhibition were created over a period of more than 35 years, spanning the active career thus far of Claire Falkenstein. From *Thrust*, made in San Francisco in 1947, through the most recent painting, *From Sign to Symbol,* created just this year, it is clear that Falkenstein is an artist in possession of a fertile imagination of singular energy and originality. She is consistently inventive in her selection of materials. The spring aluminum of *Aerial,* the iron wire of *Sun #10,* the chunks of Murano glass incorporated into *Vibrazione Venezia*, and the bamboo and linen of *Signal* consistently confound our expectations of appropriate media for sculpture.

These works also rebel against historically defined concepts of the way sculpture should look. Resolutely avoiding any reference to the human figure, or any other representational elements, Falkenstein creates objects constructed from a personal vocabulary of abstract symbols.

Even cursory examination of the exhibited pieces presents an impression of great formal and technical diversity. They range in scale from the modest dimensions of *Three Shapes Within A Structure* to the immensity of *Traveler*, from the human-scaled and manipulable design of *Thrust* to the grandeur of the *Emblems* and the planned-for monumentality of the *Tribute to A. Quincy Jones.* They also display a wide range of techniques. Almost every piece is fabricated in a different medium. Some, such as *Vibrazione Venezia*, utilize color to create their effects, while others, such as *Split Log Truss #2*, are restricted to the natural colors of the materials employed. Their formal scope is remarkable.

However, despite this apparent diversity, these paintings and sculptures do in fact share a number of formal elements, deriving directly and inevitably from Falkenstein's consistent philosophical system. Once the key to their meaning is deciphered, their content can be readily comprehended.

One unifying factor is the absence of solid volumes. There is a consistent avoidance of the depiction of objects which displace or entrap space within a core. This leads inevitably to the use of two-dimensional elements to define shape. The wire of *Integrating Rectangle* or *Sun #10,* the linen sheets of *Signal* and the *Emblems,* which function as two-dimensional planes, and the literal hole in the center of *Three Shapes Within A Structure* are a few examples of objects constructed without solid impenetrable shape. Falkenstein frequently employs an accumulation of similar objects to build form. This is most apparent in the *Moving Point Drawings* and the *Never Ending Screen* series, but it is an operative principle in most of her works. In her mature work Falkenstein avoids creating solid, monolithic objects.

Falkenstein rejects anything evoking Euclidian geometry, which she perceives as demarcating a flat, static world. Geometric solids enclose finite quantities of space. They are artificial constructs. In place of geometry, Falkenstein substitutes topology.

> It [Euclidian geometry] relates to the Renaissance and the use of geometry and perspective and the whole idea of the rectilinear world of how to measure space. But I feel that topology is more related to probability and continuum and our whole attitude toward the Einsteinian space. And that is curved space. (*Los Angeles Art Community Group Portrait,* pp. 54-55)

Falkenstein's shapes are irregular, composed of curving contours which defy the regular shapes of solid geometry. Like Calder, her work anticipated the "Eccentric Abstraction" of the counter-minimalists of the 1960s. The organic, flowing nature of her shapes also relates her to the organic abstractions of Arp and Hepworth. Both of these sculptors, though, accept the principle of the sculptural solid as formal concept, an idea Falkenstein has abandoned.

Falkenstein's formal vocabulary derives from her efforts to express, through the tangible forms of art, the principles of universal forces and processes. She operates outside of the realm of the individual exemplar to the depiction of concepts which operate on a cosmic scale. In a strictly non-religious sense Falkenstein's works are metaphors for universal existence, which in an earlier epoch would be referred to as the divine. Like Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, contemplating the vast expanse of ocean, Falkenstein's imagery, when properly

understood, lifts the viewer out of the mundane, tangible plane of existence into the contemplation of the universe in its unknowable immensity.

Fundamental to an understanding of the underlying consistencies of Falkenstein's works is the artist's attitude toward space, based on Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

> So when I'm talking about expanding space, I'm thinking in terms actually Einsteinian, the Einstein attitude of the expanding universe. I'm thinking about total space, that you do not make something to displace space but whatever you do is part of space. It's a through thing. It's not something that pushes space away from it, but space goes through it. (*Ibid.*, pp. 189)

Thus one underlying principle of Falkenstein's art is never to create objects or images which imply that one can entrap or separate space and thereby isolate any object from the unity of the natural world.

This conception of space which flows and extends uninterruptedly has developed in Falkenstein's *oeuvre* into metaphors of infinite expandibility. It is best exemplified by the *Never Ending Screen*. Based on non-parallelism, the *Never Ending Screen* is a code or metaphor for "infinity," which avoids repetition of a module unit. The *Never Ending Screen* incorporates the intellectual potential to express the Einsteinian concept of the universe as endlessly expanding.

Falkenstein has explained this principle in the following manner:

> ...I feel that the total sense of the universe can be revealed in a thing like this if one has within them the possibility of entering into it...we human beings are part of space in that we as mobile parts of the universe have multiple points of view, we're in motion, everything is in change and flux, and whatever in our environment has real meaning has to be in sympathy and harmony with all mobility. (*Ibid.*, pp. 191-192).

This infinitely expanding space is not static, finite, measurable, and quantifiable, but fluid, expanding, and in constant motion. Falkenstein's images are visually active. One cannot isolate static, discrete elements and perceive them as sitting solidly in space. The actual expression of movement in the *Wind Machine* is implicit in all her other works.

Falkenstein's ability to invent a visual language designed to focus on the mysterious magnitude of the cosmos reveals a unique and modern Romantic sensibility. Such an achievement justifies ranking her among the major American sculptors of the post-World War II era.

Wendy Slatkin
Curator

The Continuing Vision of Claire Falkenstein, 1947-1984

After Claire Falkenstein arrived in Paris from San Francisco in 1950 and had begun to work and exhibit throughout Europe, the Italian critic Morucchio welcomed her as the "strong and joyful Californian."[1] The French critic Michel Tapie hailed her as a representative of "the Ecole du Pacifique,"[2] generous as a geographical reference to San Francisco, perhaps, but nonetheless a tribute to the distinction West Coast artists had earned, and the particularly high esteem given to Falkenstein. Historically, she has been associated, rightly or wrongly, with the Abstract Expressionists of the '50s, with the Minimalists of the '60s, and with the profusion of abstract styles of the '70s and '80s.

Falkenstein is a contemporary of the Abstract Expressionists, but in fact started sooner, lasted longer, and surpassed them in formal vocabulary, both in the variety of materials she used and in her techniques. She not only exhibited in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s but also in San Francisco, Paris, and throughout Europe. The last distinction was in fact rare enough to be virtually unique among American abstract sculptors.

Like generations of young American artists before her, Falkenstein felt compelled to make contact with Paris. Young perhaps, but certainly not unsophisticated, she knew the European art scene by study and by direct contact before she arrived there. She had studied with Archipenko at Mills College in Oakland, California, concentrating on the human figure, on modelling clay and problems of volume and surface —namely, the most traditional concerns of sculpture. Her primary interest, however, was already abstraction, which soon led to such works in the present exhibition as *Thrust* (1947), *Aerial* (1947), and the painted wood panel titled *Three Shapes Within a Structure* (1948)

Falkenstein is one of the most respected abstract artists of the twentieth century. From the beginning of her career, she evinced an immediate grasp of the principal issues of modern sculpture—a special commitment to abstraction, and a rejection of art as illustrative or in any way representational. She was among the few American sculptors of her generation, such as David Smith, who were driving sculpture into unknown areas of exploration, as Clyfford Still and the New York School were doing in painting.

Falkenstein began by challenging the accepted canons of traditional sculpture, namely the human figure as subject and the age-old concentration on solid volume, surface, and profile. By the 1950s, she had eliminated all four. In their stead came a concentration on concept, or "principle" as she terms it, on space, on material, and on method.

The main business of the abstract artist is the invention of form. Artists invent it, explore it, make endless variations on it and, in some cases, exhaust it. In the works of Rothko, Gottlieb, Pollock, and others, form becomes a recognizable artistic identity or signature. Falkenstein has continually forced her formal vocabulary to change and grow. For instance, the *Never Ending Screen*, of which there are two examples in this exhibition, proved to be a fertile concept which generated work in several different directions. She has succeeded in inventing a formidable visual language which indeed appears to be inexhaustible—like the sculptor herself.

Only a fraction of her formal vocabulary is demonstrated by this exhibition. It is exceedingly rich and flexible, capable of bold, raw statements (such as *Split Log Truss #2*, 1977) or of great suavity (as in the *Never Ending Screen* or the *Moving Point* series). It is capable of subtlety (the *Vibration* series) and wit (*Predator,* 1964, a grocery store shopping cart). It can be functional, as in the garden wall at South Coast Plaza (*Sun Ribbon*, 1983). This unique visual language works in miniature in Falkenstein's jewelry and in the vast scale of the 100-foot windows of St. Basil's church (1969) on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. Moreover, this vocabulary responds afresh to each new technique and material.

The range of materials in her work is unusual for any artist in any time. She uses clay, wood, iron, copper, silver, aluminum, magnesite, gold, plastic, brass, canvas, paper, textiles, carbon paper, glass, film, sandpaper, exposed X-ray film—in short, anything she can get her hands on. The San Francisco art critic, Alfred Frankenstein, reviewing her work in the 1940s, noted even then her insatiable interest in materials plus the bewildering variety of her work, and suggested she was

possibly out of control![4] "That's just the point," Falkenstein exulted. "Artists have to throw themselves into chaos. There is no other way."[5]

Essential in all of Falkenstein's work is her continuing concentration on space and concomitant disintegration of mass. All artists are faced with the dilemma of making ideas visible, whether it is a notion of a god or an emotion or a concept of the void. The "void" is by definition empty and invisible. The eye cannot focus on it, although the intellect handles it easily enough. Space is assuredly physical, but has to be made visible—not by metaphor, not by filling it, coloring it, or labelling it, but by somehow marking its limits.

In the earliest works in this exhibition, Falkenstein is already opening up mass and making space visible—first as a hole in the middle of a painted wooden panel, then by the concavity of a spring aluminum panel, and finally by elements that can move through space. In each case, space is an important element but not yet primary. Basic to the work entitled *Thrust* is the idea of change in spatial relationships and the intimation of space/time concepts. Slots in the base enable the aluminum panels to change positions. The etched surfaces of the aluminum contribute further dynamics via their changing light reflections. These surfaces therefore have their own distinctive luminous energy.

Space had become increasingly important; five years later, it became the primary consideration. Falkenstein's first *Sun* was finished in 1952, and led to an extensive and richly varied exploration of this form. There are about thirty-six *Suns*, dating from 1952 through 1967.

The *Suns* are essentially *amorphous spaces*, thus constituting a double challenge to the fixed, definitive masses of traditional sculpture. In *Sun #10* (1957), space is delimited by a network of fine wires. It is suspended from the ceiling, moving gently, appearing to float freely like the gaseous cloud its title suggests. This space is marked by delicate but firm lacings of wire which loop and spin around it in a variety of rhythms. Sometimes the wires are closely knit, suggesting density; other times they are spare and loose, suggesting expansion. The material, wire, is used to dematerialize. These are open structures in which the interstices are more important than their wire boundaries. Interior becomes exterior and vice-versa, an expression of the continuity of all things; an entire complex of spaces is implied by the variety of openings and their infinitely various relationships. With its shiny, nickel-plated surfaces flooded by the free flow of light and air, it becomes a transparent and luminous image of space.

Twentieth-century science, Einstein in particular and Freud too, have provided the greatest romance of our time. Probing inner spaces and outer depths, positing notions that are beyond sight and usually beyond understanding, science has described the mechanics of phenomena beyond the ken of telescope and microscope, yet based on material evidence and reasoned theory. Again, how does the artist make this visible? Not the actuality of it but the sense of it and the poetry.

Allusions to these phenomena abound in the titles of modern painting and sculpture. Falkenstein is clearly inspired by the Theory of Relativity, the ever-expanding universe, topology, gravity, and molecular structure. But she states that the initial impetus for her works is always "the principle." The works become metaphors after the fact, of such abstractions as thrust, continuity, never-ending, aerial, envelope, or of such observable phenomena as flight, vibration, sun, and moon.

The impetus for a work is also partially the medium. Falkenstein's use of wire in the *Suns* and other work of the '50s was a serendipitous event which occurred when she could not afford the cost of casting her sculpture and bought the cheapest iron "stove pipe wire" instead. When she began working with this material, as always there developed an active relationship with it. Wire suggested forms and structures that were not wholly anticipated. This resulted in a series of works in the 1950s and after.

By the 1980s, her *oeuvre* presents an amazing inventory of the capabilities of wire. It has been bent, twisted, spiralled, cast, wrought, wrapped, stretched, melted, cut, threaded, fused, linked, flattened, split, welded, soldered, and then some. It has been fused with glass, combined with water, gilded, painted, stained, even inked and run through a press!

Earlier sculptors used wire as an armature to support clay figures. Now the wire itself becomes the object and the objective. Wonderful new forms are born of this special sensitivity to the medium.

Integrating Rectangle (1957) is made of delicate wires and does not appear to be a work with tactile appeal. When it is in fact touched, it has the distinct sound of distant thunder. It is about a geometric shape, the rectangle, which is used as a unit or "sign," its meaning as abstract as a character from an alphabet. It is integrated with itself over and over again, changing in relationship by size, position, and proportion. This is a large, imposing work but is constituted entirely of slender wire "signs," interconnected and tracking back and forth in an elegant calligraphy, winding through space and making that space visible. It is a work of utmost subtlety, a cloudlike form, ephemeral and diffuse, eluding both focus and touch. Falkenstein has said her aim is "to capture the universals in sensory experience and organize this material into expressive structures."[6]

At the same time that Falkenstein eliminated solid form in her sculpture, she eliminated another fundamental, the tactile surface, proving again that nothing is sacred. Touching wire is unlike touching marble, wood, bronze, or anything with a continuous plane as its surface. It is more akin to touching guitar strings and sometimes just as resonant. The *Point As A Set* works present exceedingly aggressive textures which are forbidding to the touch and have to be handled gingerly, if at

all. These are optical works that tend to defy the tactile sense. Falkenstein's works in sheet metal have sharp edges. The masses of glass in the *Fusion* series often have treacherously ragged surfaces.

The *Never Ending Screen* is, above all, expressive of Falkenstein's abiding interest in structure, in continuity, in space, and in the concept of infinity. The principle of organization here is an "over-all" composition, that is, without a hierarchy of focal points, the periphery being as important as the center. It is a "field" with no beginning and no end. The work points in every direction beyond itself, implying an infinite extension into space and time. To achieve this, the sculptor has positioned the units, short aluminum rods, "in non-parallel relationships to maintain a dynamism of motion to keep it moving *out* and becoming part of total space. It takes [the viewer] to the edges where one can escape into infinity."[7]

The elements of the *Never Ending Screen* are kept strictly to a single plane, reminiscent of two-dimensional structures such as the veining of a leaf, lace, or a trellis. In Falkenstein's *oeuvre,* these are some of the most systematic works, immediately comprehensible.

In contrast is the magnificent and forbidding *Point As A Set* series, works which are similarly modular in composition and additive in method. The module here is a section of the "sign of the U" and is a slightly curved bit of tubing although no longer restricted to a plane. This work is a sphere of the most aggressive sort. Appearing to be propelled from the center outward, it has thorn-like projections and a ragged exterior, hostile to the touch. Each tube has flattened, hammered ends, giving a sharp edge which points out into space. The works in the *Point* series are dense to the degree that they deny the eye access to their interiors. These are weighty, difficult pieces, in contrast to the *Never Ending Screen;* however, the principle is the same.

In *Cast Paper,* the *Never Ending Screen* is seen in reverse, upside-down, and inside-out. Positive material elements become spaces. Spaces become solids. It is yet another way of making space visible. Falkenstein has used the *Never Ending Screen* to imprint a hollow space in thick, wet paper. It is surprising to find paper used so sculpturally and on such a large scale. It is a bold work, too, in its domical projection from the wall, in its absolute blackness, and in its warped asymmetry. Here, the *Never Ending Screen,* a fully developed formal concept, creates a whole new generation of works.

In every decade of her career, Falkenstein has worked in wood, whether with a ban saw, bamboo poles, ax handles, or a baseball bat. Now, in the 1980s, it is whole tree trunks. The *Never Ending Screen,* and the *Trusses,* and myriad other structures are finally realized on a grand scale with one of the newest projects, *The Forum.* This tribute to architect A. Quincy Jones will be built on a gentle, grassy slope at California State University at Dominguez Hills. Great logs of Port Orford cedar are used virtually as a raw material in its natural state, in the out of doors.

The Forum is more than large scale sculpture. It is architecture and it is environment. It takes its place with Greek theaters, Noguchi's sculpture gardens, with Heizer's earth works and Gaudi's famous bench at Guell Park. It is a resounding culmination of Falkenstein's sculptural concerns and philosophical themes. Everything is here: her early use of wood, her fascination with the implications of interstices, her drawing in space, her sense of the continuity of all things, of topology, and the idea of structure and flow. Typical of her work, there is more space than mass. Hence, it invites the flow of campus life, providing seating, a platform for speakers, walkways and vistas in all directions. It has both a human and monumental scale. It creates giant calligraphy against the sky, gesturing continually out into space. Like Falkenstein's formal idiom, this architectural environmental sculpture will forever be a living thing.

Maren Henderson

Footnotes:

1. Umberto Morucchio, quoted in *Claire Falkenstein* (Anaheim, California: Haddad Fine Arts in cooperation with the Palm Springs Desert Museum, 1980), unpaginated.
2. Michel Tapie de Celeyran, "Claire Falkenstein," trans. Julia Randall, *Arts and Architecture 72* (June 1955), 16-17.
3. Personal interview with Claire Falkenstein, 29 April 1984.
4. Alfred Frankenstein, "Around the Local Galleries," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 3 July 1949, p. 9.
5. Personal interview with Claire Falkenstein, 24 July 1984.
6. Personal interview with Claire Falkenstein, 16 July 1984.
7. Personal interview with Claire Falkenstein, 20 July 1984.

Claire Falkenstein
Selected Biographical Information

Born in Coos Bay, Oregon

Education
A.B. in Letters & Science, University of California, Berkeley. Studied with Alexander Archipenko at Mills College, Oakland, California.

Teaching Appointments
Anna Head School, Berkeley, California. Mills College, Oakland, California. University of California, Berkeley and Los Angeles Extension Divisions. San Francisco Museum of Art. California School of Fine Arts (now San Francisco Art Institute). California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. And others.

Awards
Women of the Year for Art, Los Angeles Times, 1969. John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, 1978-79. Women Artist Honored by the National Women's Caucus for Art, 1981. Founding Member of the Artist's Forum, California State University System, 1984. And many others.

Selected Major Exhibitions
Werkbund, Berlin, Germany, 1952. Institute of Contemporary Art, London, England, 1953. Galerie Stadler, Paris, France, 1955. Junge Amerikanische Kunst, Iserlohn, Germany, 1956. Sala Gaspar, Barcelona, Spain, 1957. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1958. Osaka International Festival, Japan, 1958. New York-Rome Foundation, Rome, Italy, 1960. Women's International Show, Poland, 1960. International Center of Aesthetic Research, Turin, Italy, 1960. Musee Rodin, Exposition International, Paris, France, 1961. Pavillon de Marsan, Louvre, Paris, France, 1962. Esther Robles Gallery, Los Angeles, California, 1963. Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, 1963. Whitney Museum, New York, 1964. Scripps College, Claremont, California, 1964. Phoenix Museum of Art, Phoenix, Arizona, 1967. Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California, 1968. Fresno Art Center, Fresno, California, 1969. Utah State University, Logan, Utah, 1972. Polly Friedlander Gallery, Seattle, Washington, 1973. Thousand Oaks Art Council, Thousand Oaks, California, 1975. Tortue Gallery, Santa Monica, California, 1975. Coos Bay Art Museum, Coos Bay, Oregon, 1976. Grossmont College Art Gallery, El Cajon, California, 1977. Stewart Neill Gallery, New York, 1978. Tate Gallery, London, England, 1978. California Polytechnic, Pomona, California, 1978. Palm Springs Desert Museum, Palm Springs, California, 1980. Smith-Anderson Gallery, Palo Alto, California, 1981. Neill Gallery, New York, 1981. Idyllwild School for Music & the Arts, Idyllwild, California, 1983. William & Catherine Hemmerdinger Gallery, Palm Desert, California, 1984. And many, many more.

Selected Major Commissions
Stair Screen for architect Luigi Moretti, Galerie Spazio, Rome, Italy, 1954. Stair Screen for Rodolphe Stadler, Galerie Stadler, Paris, France, 1955. Grotto Gates for the Villa of Princess Pignatelli, Rome, Italy, 1957. Garden Gates for the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni of Peggy Guggenheim, Venice, Italy, 1961. *'U' As A Set*, sculpture for reflecting pool, State University, Long Beach, California, 1965. *Point As A Set #17* for Joseph Magnin store, Century City, California, 1965. *Three Fires,* sculpture for reflecting pools, Fresno Mall, Fresno, California, 1966. Saint Basil Church, Los Angeles, 15 window screens and 8 doors, 1968-69. *Point As A Set #25.* for entrance to UCLA Sculpture Garden, Los Angeles, 1970-71. *Accelerating Point,* three pieces for reflecting pool, Sculpture Garden, Fine Arts Gallery, San Diego, California, 1974. *Montage-Section,* Eileen Norris Cinema Theatre, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1975-76. *Continuum,* Bing Theatre, USC, Los Angeles, 1976. *The Forum, Tribute to A. Quincy Jones,* State University, Dominguez Hills, California, 1980. *Sun Ribbon Wind Screens,* South Coast Plaza, Costa Mesa, California, 1982. *Tide Pool,* fountain for Golden Gateway North, San Francisco, California, 1983. Plus many, many others.

Other
Dialogues in Art, KNBC, Channel 4 in Los Angeles, in cooperation with the UCLA Extension and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1969.
Documentary Film, *Claire Falkenstein: Sculptor,* 1977. Directed by Jae Carmichael. Produced by Jae Carmichael and Joan Carter.

Plates

Thrust

No. 1

Thrust

1947 Walnut, aluminum, 3'x3.75'x2.25'

Thrust is an early example in Falkenstein's work of the opening up of volume to reveal the spaces within deep structure—the interstices—while exploiting the potentials of industrial material, in this instance sheet aluminum. Falkenstein cuts the two metal sheets to form thrusting planes, attached to metal bars set into slots in the walnut base which may be manipulated by the viewer. Incorporating the viewer's actions directly, as the rods are moved in their slots, the interlocking planes of the essentially flat, spatial drawing take on volume. The interstices are revealed, creating tension and ambiguity between the voids and solids.

Ambiguity—the antithesis of the absolute—is a fundamental element in *Thrust*, as it is in all of Falkenstein's work. Not only does ambiguity result from the myriad number of possible forms which the sculpture may assume through manipulation, but it also exists in the very title of the work. Revealing an emotional need to thrust her art and its potentiality beyond known limits, Falkenstein created a structure of motion incorporating the element of time, a concern shared by the Constructivists Tatlin and Gabo earlier in this century.

Energy pulses along the dynamic assymmetrical projections, its momentum only halted by the accent points at the tips of these elements. The triangular walnut base, an integral part of the sculpture, also thrusts into the viewer's space, accenting the frontality of the work while also serving as the stabilizing gravitational force for the lighter aluminum projections, which appear to have the power to shoot out into the atmosphere. Adding to the work's sense of mystery are the references to the figure. Falkenstein found inspiration in the dynamic sense of forward motion in the Greek Hellenistic sculpture *Nike of Samothrace* (200-190 B.C.), and unconsciously incorporated the sculpture's essence in *Thrust*.

Thrust demonstrates the artist's highly subjective search for a counterpart for emotions within a disciplined conceptual work, reflecting the modernist premise which asserts that it is the spirit of the work, not anatomical laws, which determine the resulting form.

V.F.

No. 2

Aerial

1947 Spring aluminum, 2.8'x2.5'

Continuing her exploration of non-traditional materials and techniques, as seen in *Thrust* of the previous year, Falkenstein again employs spring aluminum. This material has few historical precedents other than works by the Constructivists Gabo and Rodchenko, who also employed industrial materials in their geometrical abstractions. The rectangular metal sheet is compressed into a concave wedged form, creating a warped surface. Falkenstein applied earth-toned paint with an air brush, an innovative technique later widely employed by the Pop artists of the 1960s, and the Photo-Realist painters in the 1970s. References to the figure are absent; Falkenstein uses pure abstract forms as representations of her inner feelings, her urge for flight.

Aerial confronts the viewer with a multitude of discontinuous abstract forms. The warped plane of the relief is held in tension by its emphatic vertical edges, which seem to be only slight barriers to the forms. The piece recedes and advances in compressed, potentially violent movement, threatening to spin out into the viewer's space and, ultimately, into infinity. Spatial ambiguities arise between the concave surface of the aluminum, which creates a continuum with the viewer's space by the reflection of light, and the painted, planar elements, which appear to tumble and vibrate in space. Continuous depth is implied by the movement of light across the warped surface, a literal reflection of Falkenstein's explorations of spatial continuity and the interstice, more fully realized in the *Sun Series*.

This energy charged relief expresses the dramatically increased inner tensions of the artist, and her need to break the restraints upon her work and her life which soon resulted in her long sojourn in Europe from 1950 to 1963. Overlapping planar elements, charged with the dynamism of the diagonal line, give tangible form to the intangible concepts of time and motion through expanding and curved space. Falkenstein presents a slice of evolutionary development, infinite in its implications.

V.F.

Aerial

Three Shapes Within a Structure

No. 3

Three Shapes Within a Structure

1948 Enamel on plywood, 2.4'x3.6'

This relatively small painted form is deceptively simple and unpretentious, yet thoroughly fascinating in its visual complexities. Building on the organic abstract vocabulary developed by Arp and Miro in the 1930s, the conceptual premises of this piece anticipate some key concerns of the 1960s. Falkenstein plays with tensions between literal and depicted shapes, positive and negative spaces, and ambiguities between two and three dimensions.

The work is a two-dimensional, asymmetrical form. Resting on a straight base, the shape projects strongly toward the right and expands upward toward the left. An irregularly shaped hole in the center echoes this overall shape without imitating it precisely.

The surface is painted in five separate groups of color: brilliant red on the far right; gold, which starts on the right, but appears to flow around the hole; a dark, charcoal gray with blue markings; a lighter gray with darker modulations; and solid black, visible in the upper left. If one must reduce these five colored areas to the three basic shapes of the title, the black and one other colored area must be interpreted as negative spaces.

In a strictly non-illusionistic manner, this work conveys a sense of great depth. The lines form one spatial plane, the "shapes" exist in another, while the black creates a sense of deep spatial void. *Three Shapes Within a Structure* almost reads like a relief sculpture rather than a painting. Spatial ambiguities already present in the arrangement of the five colors are further complicated by the "cutout" of red superimposed on the gold, creating a figure/ground reversal. Falkenstein has layered this work with a network of red and gray lines streaking across the surface of the image. The lines continue uninterruptedly across the central opening, denying its "emptiness."

This non-rectangular surface anticipates Frank Stella's shaped canvases of the early 1960s. The use of abstract, organic, non-geometric forms, the piercing of the solid wooden board with a hole, and the non-parallel streaking lines which run off the surfaces and imply a continuous space larger than the depicted space are all elements which would be pursued and developed in Falkenstein's *oeuvre* during the following thirty years.

W.S.

No. 4

Integrating Rectangle

1957 Wire, 3.75'x3.5'

Falkenstein's investigations of topology and the underlying deep structure of all matter emanates from her efforts to represent the universal forces of nature through art without imitating natural forms. *Integrating Rectangle* reduces the structures of life to a single unit, a rectangle which changes in position, proportion, and size.

The rectangle defines the space which flows freely throughout the work, creating a continuum with its surrounding atmosphere. The rectangular planes move from interior to exterior in undulating, constant motion, revealing the interstices. Utilizing the linear wire to "draw" in space, Falkenstein develops Calder's use of wire which he employed to create sculptural form in the 1930s. *Integrating Rectangle* is an early example of the "drawing in space" with wire which would be employed in the *Pignatelli Gates* and the portal of the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, Peggy Guggenheim's villa in Venice.

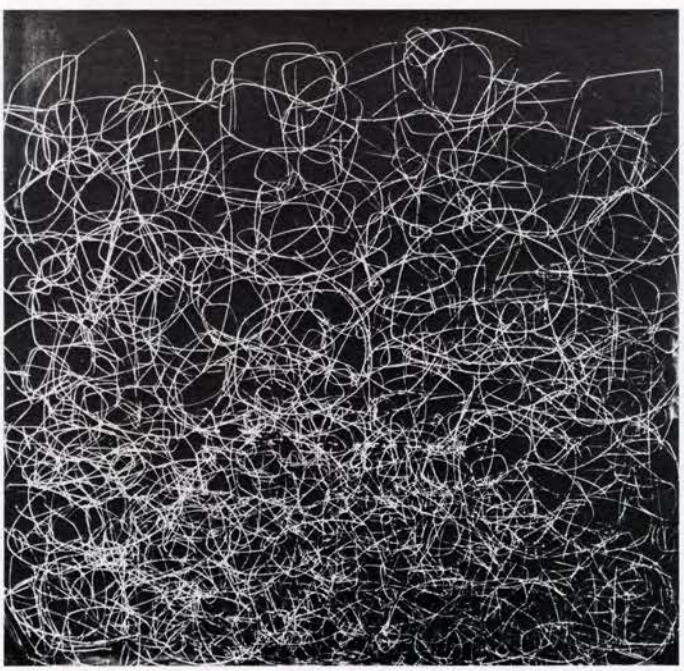
Seemingly chaotic in appearance, *Integrating Rectangle* is in fact a highly organized, conceptual work which achieves order and unity through the use of the single rectangular unit.

The rectangle is one of a number of "signs" in Falkenstein's vocabulary, which includes the cone, the point, the "U," and the pronged non-parallel forms of the *Never Ending Screen.* Through manipulation of position and form, the multiplicity of rectangles creates a complex field expressing infinite expansion and metamorphosis of form. Falkenstein's use of the sign, a neutral symbol not bound by preestablished code or syntax, appeared unconsciously in her work through the early 1950s, and became conscious beginning with the *Pignatelli Gates*, also of 1957.

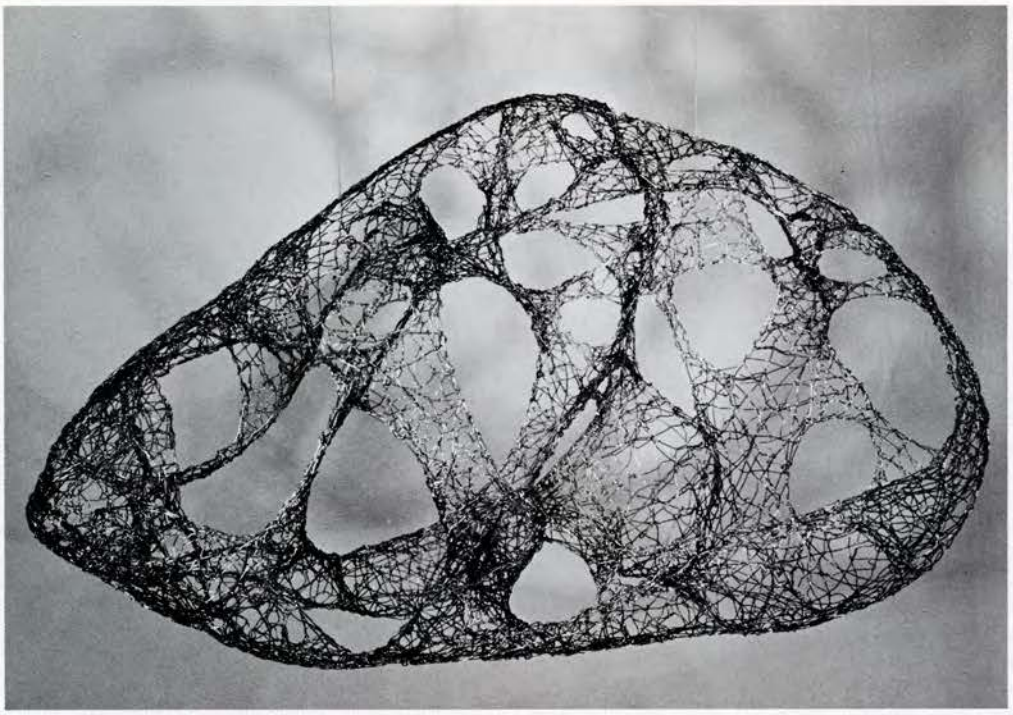
Falkenstein takes the neutral form of the rectangle out of its ordinary context in order to reassemble it and give it a new identity out of her personal need to express the center of her being and the source of her artistic vision, which she calls her "solar plexus." The result of her disciplined expression she terms a "sign into structure."

Tension and ambiguity between the sign and the signified imbue tactile form with dynamic energy. Constantly revealing, yet elusive and mysterious, *Integrating Rectangle* refers to both the macrocosmic, by its implications of infinite possibilities of expansion and merger with infinity, and the microcosmic, by the breaking down of form to reveal the basic units of the structure in the process of becoming.

V.F.



Integrating Rectangle
Photo courtesy of Claire Falkenstein



Sun #10

No. 5

Sun #10

1957 Nickel-plated iron, 4.6'x5.1'

Influenced by her study of Einstein's physical theories, the *Sun Series*, begun in 1953, was the result of the artist's explorations of the space-time continuum of curved space. While varying in proportions and scale, each *Sun* incorporates Falkenstein's use of calligraphic wire line to form a webbed structure of curvilinear planes which open to reveal the interstices within. The essentially transparent structure is suspended, creating the illusion of a free-floating element vibrating in its own atmosphere.

Falkenstein's efforts to embrace scientific concepts within her art have precedents in the twentieth century, including the works of the Russian Constructivists. El Lissitzky, a leading member of that group, wrote in 1924 of the "necessity of overcoming earthbound gravitation, to the end of creating hovering bodies in motion." Lissitzky's conception of the work of art as a "temporary halt on the way rather than a rigid goal" implies the negation of the absolute form in favor of the ambiguity of flux and evolution. These concepts are expressed throughout Falkenstein's *oeuvre*.

Pursuing her experiments with topology, Falkenstein pushed the core of the *Sun's* structure to the periphery established by the space within. Pulsating with energy, the delicate membranes of the mass draw the observer into its atmosphere. Falkenstein uses the power of the line to emphasize the convolutions of voids and volume, evoking the violent movement of the primordial fire ball.

The *Sun* structures are mysterious. Although some critics have interpreted them as spontaneous, their creation rests on a sensuous and premeditated process. For the artist, the *Sun* is "spiritual in the sense of being a direct, total work—a direct thought, direct method, direct gestures and emotions."

The elements of spontaneity, emotion, and spiritual joy in the creative act found in the *Sun Series* link them to the mature works of Jackson Pollock and the Gestural Abstractionists of the 1940s and 1950s.

V.F.

No.6

Vibrazione Venezia

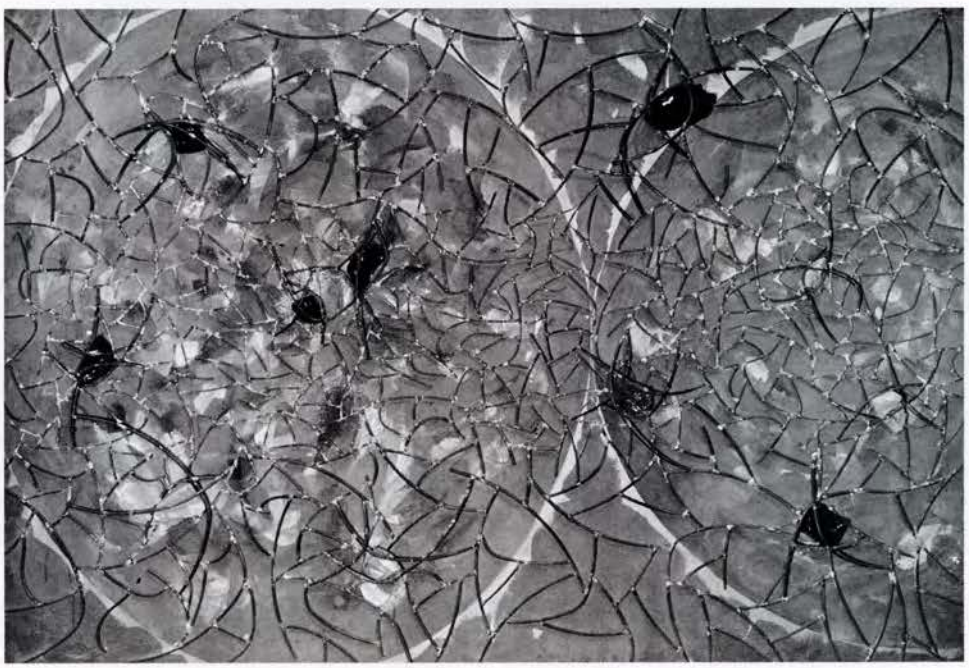
1963 Oil on canvas, iron rods, Murano glass, 8′x6′

Executed while Falkenstein was in Venice, *Vibrazione Venezia* combines the media of sculpture and painting within a rectangular format. Using oil on canvas, the artist has created a field of muted earth tones from which modulated shapes of blue, green, silver, and red vibrate to the surface within two open-ended circles of gold. Over this is a screen of curvilinear iron wire in which chunks of translucent glass have been positioned at irregular intervals. Each piece of glass is held in place by the pressure of the screen's structure. There is a sense of tension in the juxtaposition of two media in one work; nevertheless, the colors and shapes of the glass accent and intensify the forms created on the canvas by the brushstrokes. In the use of a screen incorporating chunks of glass the work is related to the garden gates of Peggy Guggenheim's Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice, executed by the artist two years earlier.

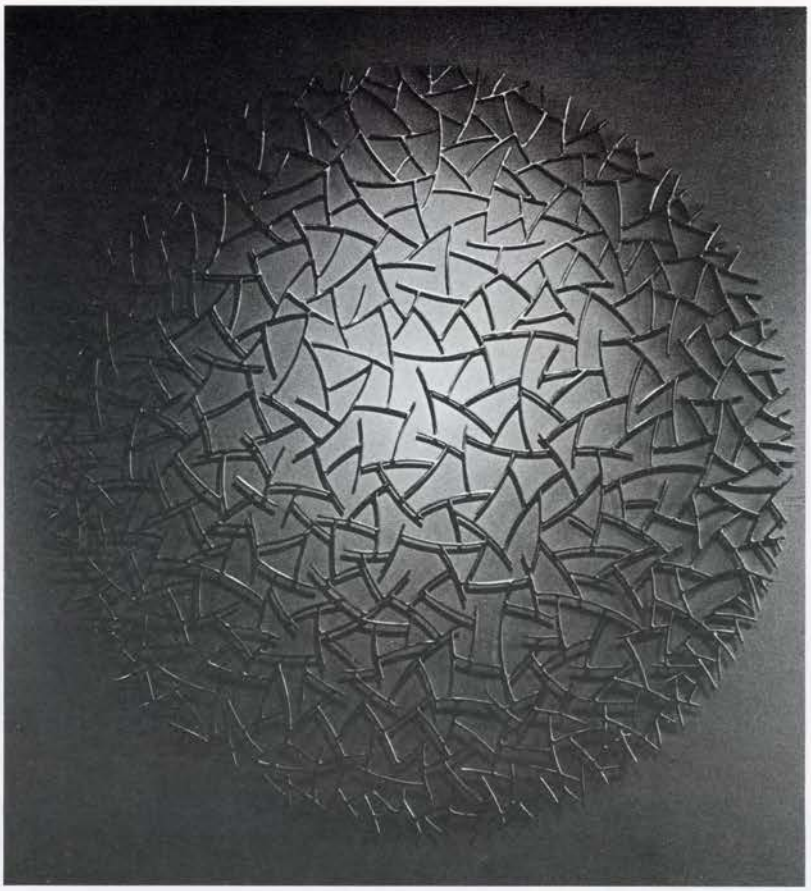
Falkenstein has stated that *Vibrazione Venezia* is intended to express the luxurious surface qualities of the Byzantine period of Venice. This feeling has been conveyed through her choice of palette, which recalls Byzantine mosaics, and the jewel-like settings which transform the glass into precious gems.

Within Falkenstein's *oeuvre*, this work is part of a series of structures based on the concept which has been her central theme since 1957. It is a metaphor for the infinite expansion of space, an ever-changing reflection of the continuous structure of the universe. The circles are rings of fire in which the blues, greens, silvers, and reds build momentum before being hurled into three-dimensional space to cool and take concrete form. The screen, with its curving cuts brazed together, evokes a sense of continuous organic motion as it travels across the surface of the field and weaves through space around the chunks of glass. The patina of its surface reflects the explosion of energy taking place within the canvas. Although contained within a rigid format, the elements of the piece are in constant flux. Further, an extension into infinity is implied in that the tendrils of the screen reach beyond the frame, and the circles can only be completed outside it.

P.B.



Vibrazione Venezia



Never Ending Screen

Photo courtesy of
Claire Falkenstein

No. 7

Never Ending Screen

1975 Polished aluminum, 6' diameter

The *Never Ending Screen* carries Falkenstein's concept of a metaphor for infinity into the realm of high technology in terms of the material used and the technique employed.

Desiring to express the endless expansion of space based on Einsteinian theory, Falkenstein has not created a volume which inhibits space, but one that explores it. Radiating from the center out, a three-pronged module creates a linear field. In its transparency it is an expanding open field in which space is curved and continuous, and air is permitted to flow through and around. The thin blades of metal direct the energy outward toward infinity with increased velocity as one leaves the center.

In the circular form there is an illusion of wholeness, but the ragged edges of the piece suggest only a temporary interruption of an additive system which is seemingly limitless in its implied extension beyond the format. From a normal viewing distance, it goes beyond the peripheral vision of the viewer and thus allows one to participate in its expansion and, through implication, that of the universe.

P.B.

Cast Paper of a Never Ending Screen

No. 8

Cast Paper of a Never Ending Screen

1975 Rag pulp, 6' diameter

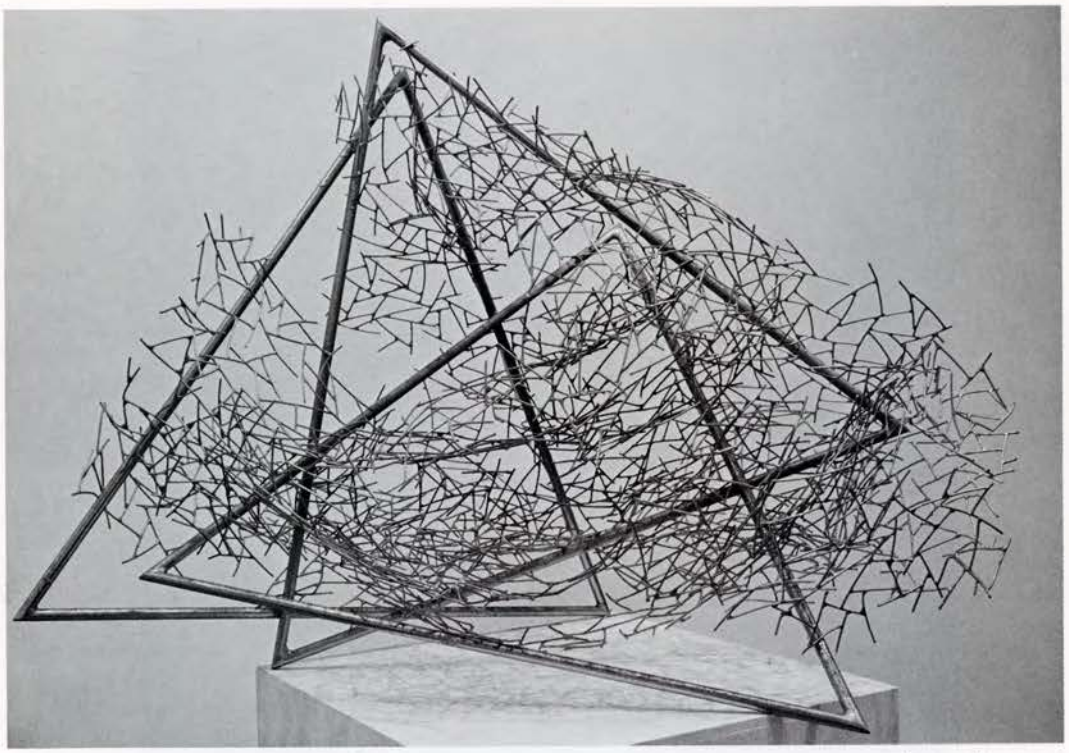
Cast Paper of a Never Ending Screen exemplifies Falkenstein's ability to continuously explore a single idea and yet create work that is boundlessly inventive. In this case the infinity symbol of the *Never Ending Screen* has served as a mold for a cast-paper bas relief, a physical record of universal expansion.

Rag pulp has been cast directly onto the screen, but unlike the flat plane of the screen, the plane of the relief is warped. It is a field of curving contours, and as such is related to Einsteinian space, which is curved. Although the paper takes over space, so that air cannot flow through the piece in the manner of the *Never Ending Screen*, the idea is conveyed through the rhythmic movement of line over the undulating field. Further, the color black evokes a sense of density as though the structure extends deep into space.

When exhibited at the Smith Anderson Gallery in San Francisco in the summer of 1976, the relief became known as the *Shield of Wotan*.[1] Wotan was the Teutonic deity who, according to legend, was the creator of the cosmos; *Cast Paper of a Never Ending Screen* is a symbol for creation.

P.B.

[1] Brown, S. *Art in America*, vol. 64, Summer 1976, p. 115.



Space Structure

No. 9

Space Structure

1978 Nickel-plated iron, 3'11"x2'11"x2'1"

The structure of the *Never Ending Screen* has been projected three-dimensionally in the sculpture entitled *Space Structure*. As with the *Screen*, the metaphorical expression of this work is the infinite expansion of space of Einsteinian theory. *Space Structure*, though relatively modest in scale, uses multiple planes to convey the idea of continuous space which has no beginning or end. The sculpture is just large enough to define the idea, but the concept could be expressed on a much more monumental scale.

Interpenetrating triangles made of nickel-plated iron rods form the basic structural support for the curvilinear arrangement of the sections of the screen. Without emanating from a nucleus, the planes of the sculpture work into and out of the triangles, creating limitless configurations as the lines intersect and overlap. It is an open structure which is intended to be viewed at eye level. In viewing the piece from different perspectives, it becomes apparent that the variety of shapes is endless and that the piece is in constant evolution. A peripheral edge cannot be drawn around the total sculpture, or around any one configuration, because the planes are all in motion as they interact with space. *Space Structure* truly reflects the idea that everything in the universe is in constant flux.

P.B.

Model for The Forum: A Tribute to A. Quincy Jones

No. 10

Model for The Forum: A Tribute to A. Quincy Jones

Wood, 2'1"x2'1"x11"

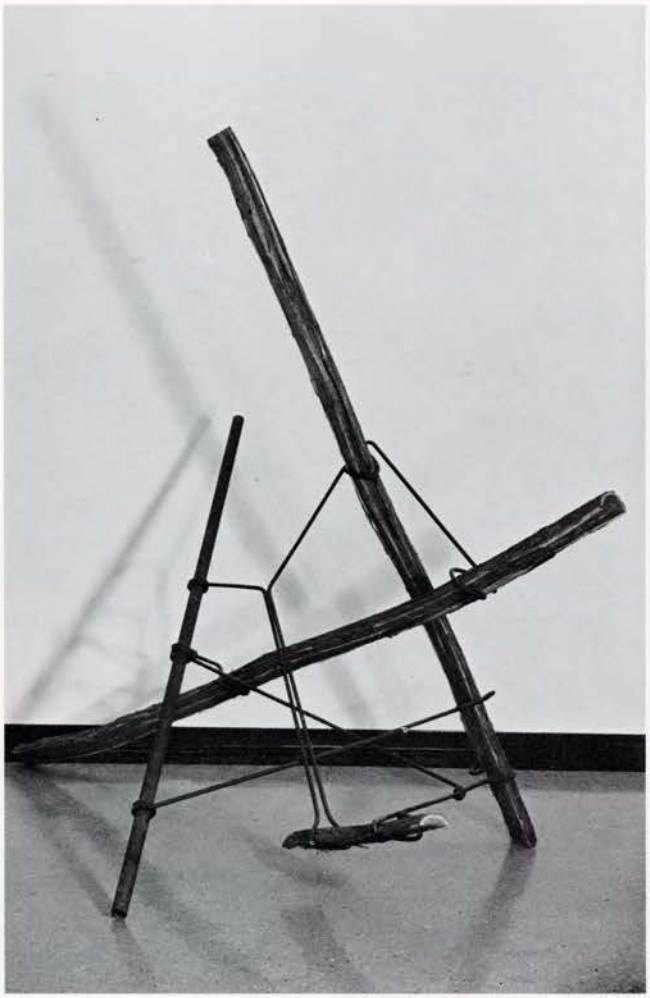
This wooden model is Falkenstein's design for a monument to A. Quincy Jones, the architect responsible for the plan of California State University, Dominguez Hills. Her installation will be composed of three rising units of immense proportions: 50' x 70' x 18' high. Using Port Orford Cedar logs, whose lengths vary from 18 to 22 feet, the artist evokes on a grand scale the childhood memory of the forest in Coos Bay, Oregon, where she was raised. Cedar was chosen for its ability to withstand the elements. In Scandinavia, 2000 year old buildings composed of this material still stand today.

Einstein noted that there is no such thing as enclosed or defined shape, only movement through space. Consequently, Renaissance notions of perspective are abolished, and the relation of shapes in space becomes the primary concern. In *Tribute*, Falkenstein begins with the center and moves the module unit of the *Never Ending Screen* outward, expanding her idea as a metaphor for the universe. The artist also twists and turns this module unit as she develops it in three dimensions. The unit changes form as the viewer moves through the sculpture. Attention is not given to the shape itself but to the movement of matter, and to the relation of this matter within an expanding universe.

Unlike the *Never Ending Screen, Tribute* is an open environment, inviting human participation. To facilitate this participation, Falkenstein separates the three units of the sculpture and places a platform in the center, thereby focusing and inspiring social contact. In the words of the artist, "...people not only look at the sculpture, but they sit and stand in it. Logs are available to them as trees are to the walker in the woods."

Falkenstein has long admired the Spanish architect Gaudi, for his ability to merge art and nature in a holistic vision. In the spirit of Gaudi, *Tribute* entices the viewer to become part of the organic flow of nature. *Tribute* presents us with a structural metaphor of unceasing growth and elastic tension. In this projected monument, Falkenstein has enlarged the finite module unit, with its infinite implications, into a unit the proportions of which rival the grand scale of nature itself. By describing a changing world in the form of a concrete object, *Tribute* is a reflection of, and a symbol for, the contemporary world.

K.H.



Split Log Truss #2

No. 11

Split Log Truss #2

1977 Locust logs, steel rods, 6.9'x8.8'x4.5'

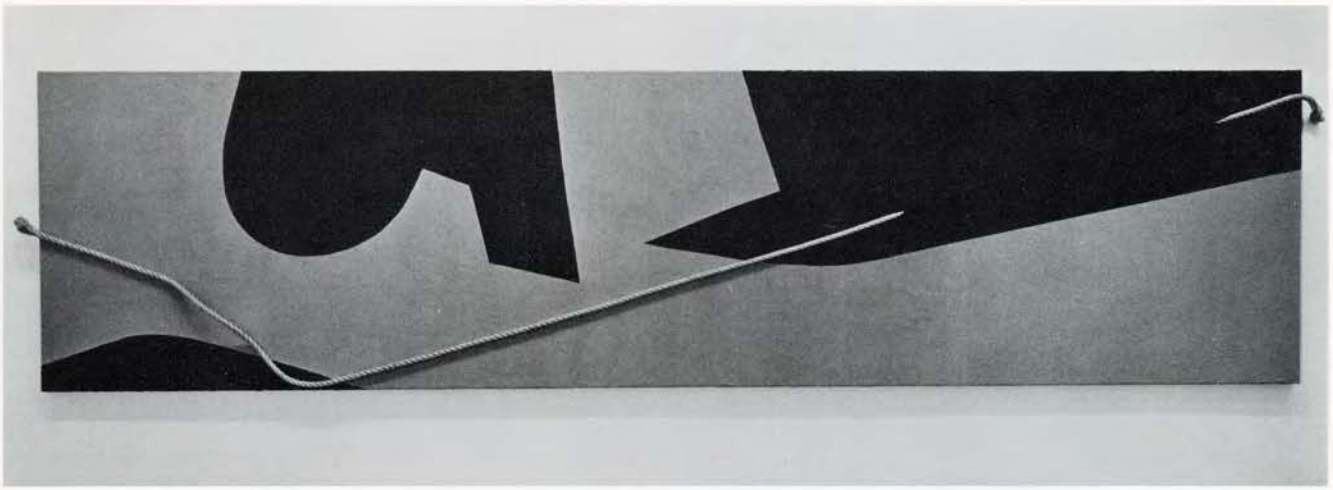
In *Split Log Truss #2* Falkenstein solved the problem of forging wood with rolled steel, an invention which allowed her to change the *Never Ending Screen* into a three-dimensional free-standing unit. Falkenstein obtained highly dense locust logs, employed in the *Truss,* while working on a commission in the High Sierras. in the High Sierras.

In *Truss #2*, Falkenstein joins material and form into a metaphor of the underlying tension and continuity found in nature. She imagines infinity, and presents us with a symbol for it. Falkenstein believes "...that we as mobile parts of the universe have multiple points of view...and whatever in our environment has real meaning has to be in sympathy and harmony with all mobility."

Truss #2, despite its stasis, becomes a "totality in motion." Since one is able to look right through it, one receives a sense of all sides of the work, even without moving around it.

The organic, infinite quality of the forest in her native Coos Bay, Oregon, helped shape the artist's vision of the expanding universe, and also influenced her in the use of natural materials. According to the artist, "one can't entrap or separate space from the unity of the natural world." The three-dimensional unit of *Truss #2*, as a symbol of the tension of natural growth, is not a discrete unit. Like Falkenstein's *Never Ending Screen*, or Brancusi's *Never Ending Column*, it incorporates the possibility of infinite expansion. Since *Truss #2* is an extension of Falkenstein's *Never Ending Screen,* the idea and the process are the same; only the aesthetic elements are different. In the words of Falkenstein, "it's a continuum of interval which could extend on forever." *Truss #2* is to be experienced as an integer of space. The interstices between the logs open up the structure while the use of the split log, itself a linear element, helps to define the three-dimensional shape of the piece. Yet since it is not self-contained, motion is generated by the boundary itself. Like our environment, *Truss #2* is in constant flux; like our universe, it has the ability to expand infinitely.

K.H.



Traveler

Traveler, Signal, Emblem I, Emblem II,
and the *Wind Machine*

This group of works, created between 1978 and 1980, are large-scaled constructions of painted linen and other materials. The conception for these pieces originates in Falkenstein's earlier explorations of topological space, but differs in her selection of materials and formal vocabulary. Falkenstein employs natural linen, painted black, to evoke associations with geometry for the first time. The black shapes are defined by hard linear edges and arcs which imitate geometric shapes without being restricted to the simple geometry of the circle, triangle, or square. Copper wire, rope, and bamboo poles are also employed in these works as linear elements. This group presents a symbol of Einsteinian spatial relationships within the universe. Although the group functions as a unified whole, the individual pieces stand strongly on their own.

No. 12

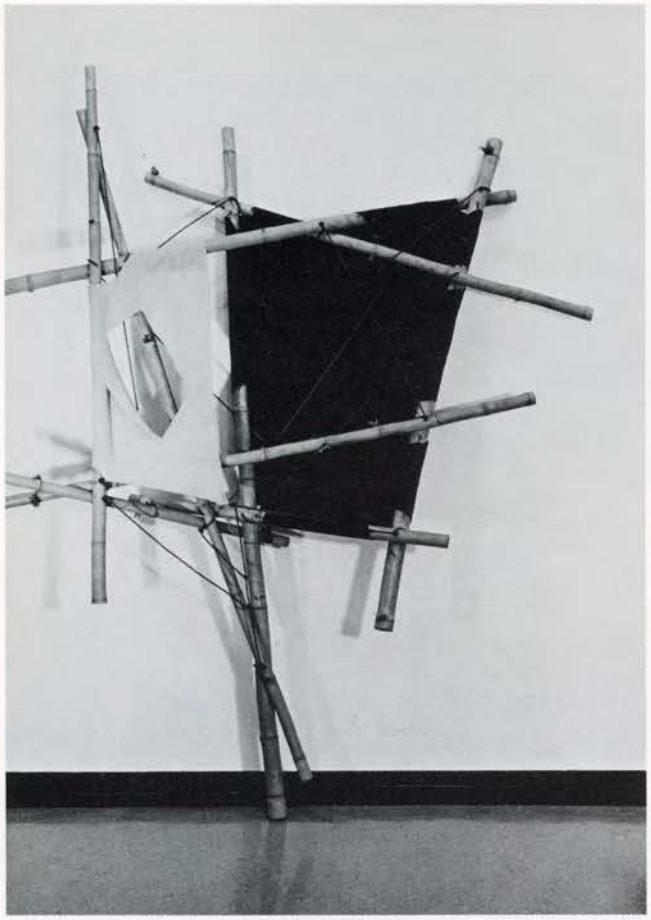
Traveler

1978 Acrylic on linen, rope 16.5'x4'

Traveler, created in 1978, was the first work in this series, although Falkenstein did not stretch it onto its present frame until 1980. The concept of the infinite expansion of the universe is expressed by its length, which far exceeds the peripheral field of vision of the human eye. A rope emerges from the black form at the bottom left and crosses the linen to recede into the black at the upper right of the piece, only to re-emerge in the upper righthand corner and hang down on the surface. With the rope as guide, one's eyes and body must literally travel through space to perceive this work.

The rope is the continuum in *Traveler*. It heightens the sense of movement created by the contrast of the black form to natural linen. The black shapes maintain their literal existence as flat painted forms on linen. However, they function symbolically in at least two different ways—the viewer has the option of reading them as solid forms floating in unidentified space or as holes back into infinite space. *Traveler* initiates a new direction in the artist's exploration of topological space within this series of works. From this large, primarily two dimensional expansion of space, Falkenstein moves to the elaboration of the theme in three dimensions, using the same basic materials.

D.H.



Signal

No. 13

Signal

1978 Acrylic on linen, copper, bamboo, 9′x9′x3′

Signal, a free-standing piece, is a truss structure with three dimensional non-parallel extensions of bamboo crossing each other on different spatial planes. Copper wire also serves to maintain the truss, and echoes the characteristics of the forms within it through non-parallel space relationships. In this work, Falkenstein presents two separate and solidly colored forms, one of linen painted black and the other of natural linen. These linen units are defined purely by their shape, created by the manner in which they are sewn around the bamboo truss.

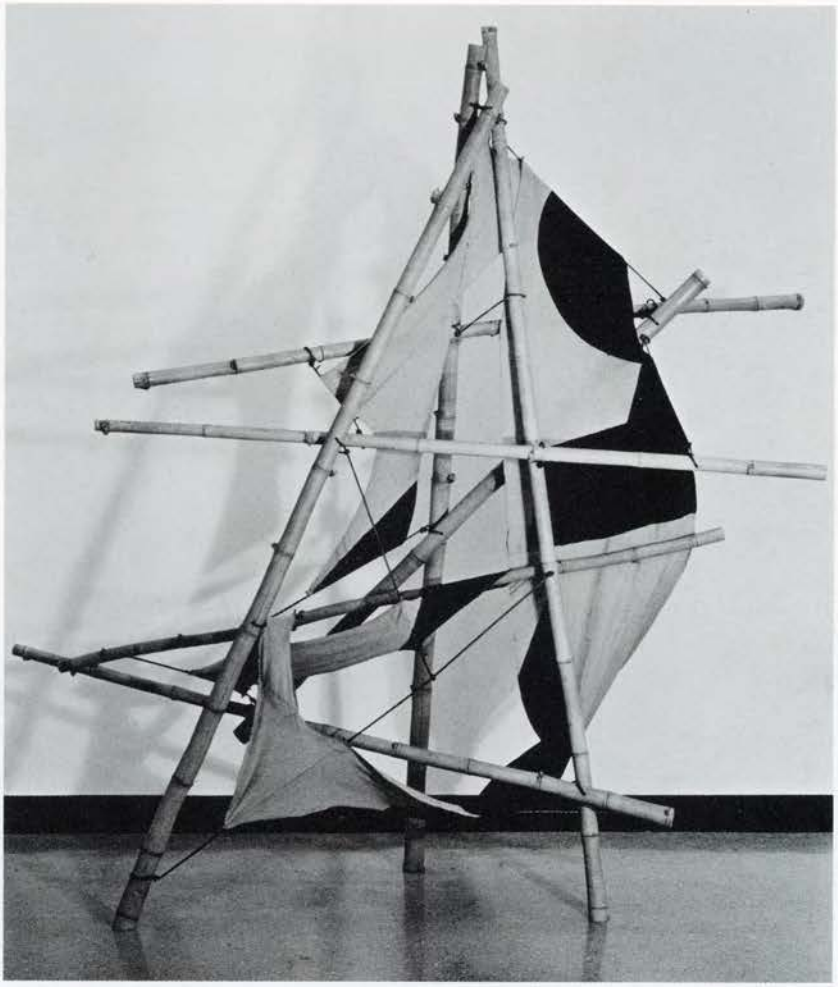
Rectilinear subdivisions of the shapes are created in three dimensions by the use of copper rods as they pass over the linen forms from one bamboo pole to another. A bond is formed between the copper rods as they meet and cross one another throughout the piece.

As with the copper rods, this bonding together of like material is also present in the linen forms, which wrap around the bamboo poles and bind to themselves. The smaller piece of natural linen is sewn around the bamboo on two sides and onto a copper wire on a third side. It is a part of the whole structure, yet also an independent entity.

All of the deceptively ingenuous formal elements of *Signal* combine to create a complex symbol of infinite space. The edges of the pieces wrap around the bamboo and then bind to themselves, creating a sense of continuous movement. The impression of infinite space is most readily apparent with the black linen, the blackness of which seems to sustain a never ending movement from within and then around the structure and back inside itself. An open space is created in the natural linen form by folding back the material. This hole in the structure is a continuum of topological space; it allows for the movement of space through the form as the form moves through space. The non-parallel bamboo poles jut out beyond the field of vision, allowing the viewer a sense of continuation.

Like *Traveler*, *Signal* is larger than life. If one steps back from the piece, the construction stands tall and ominous, like a sign or signal of space and time within the universe. The power of *Signal* lies in its ability to convey a sense of the infinite while maintaining intimacy.

D.H.



Emblem I

No. 14 and No. 15

Emblem I and Emblem II

1978 Acrylic on linen, copper, bamboo, Both 9'x9'x3'

Emblem I and *Emblem II* are free-standing truss structures of bamboo poles and copper wire supporting linen with painted shapes. These pieces demonstrate a natural progression from *Signal* in Falkenstein's exploration of multi-dimensional space.

Signal, Emblem I and *Emblem II* all relate to Falkenstein's *Split Log Truss*. The power of the truss as a "sign" derives from a formal flexibility which does not interfere with its fundamental integrity. In the architectural trusses of *Emblem I* and *II* this form now supports a linen structure rather than existing independently. The trusses extend far into space while the interstice is explored, more fully than in *Signal*, through the weaving of linen between and around the bamboo structure.

Emblem I and *Emblem II* are also related to *Traveler* in the use of shapes that imitate geometry to evoke spatial depth. The black forms of *Traveler* are taken out of their flat two-dimensional structure and placed within a truss structure, to exist literally in three-dimensional space. The flat linen fabric

Emblem II

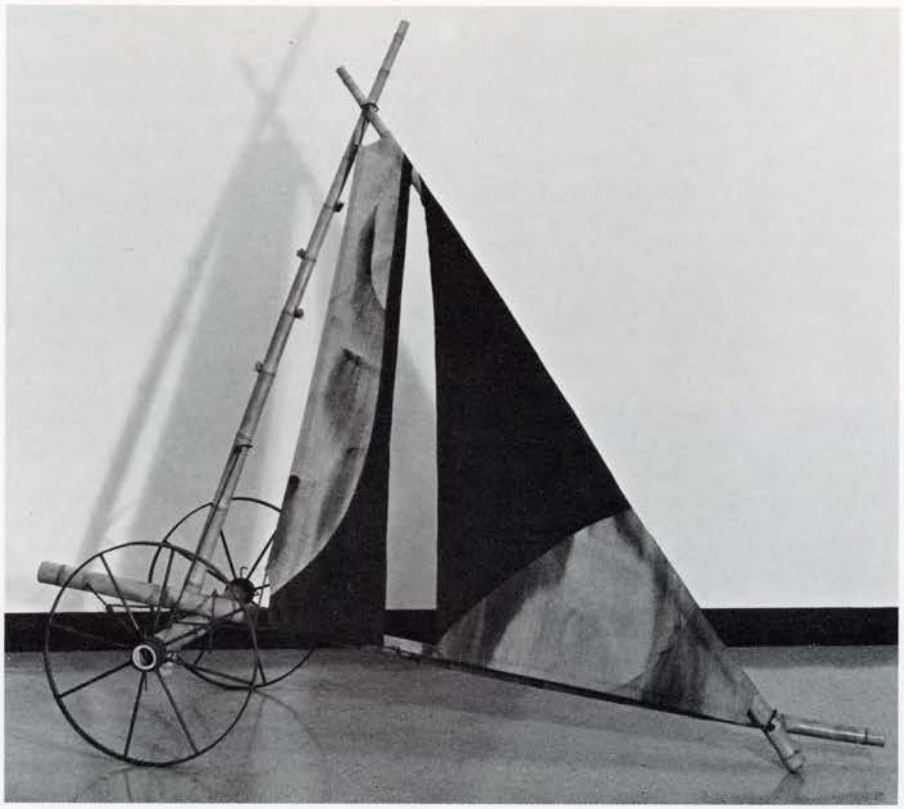
functions as both a two-dimensional plane and as a shape existing in real space.

As the linen weaves around the truss, space becomes more loosely defined, turning inside out as the linen, once a part of the interior, becomes the exterior. Through this type of movement Falkenstein expresses a sense of infinity; what is thought to be internal is both internal and external. Like the other works in this group, the large size of the *Emblems* also heightens their sense of infinite space.

The copper rods take on a more animated role in these works than they do in *Signal*, functioning in three different but related ways. As the linen weaves through the truss, the rods are at some points enveloped by the fabric. At other points they emerge from it, as does the rope in *Traveler*. The rods also function as texturally distinct forms around which the linen is bound, thus enhancing visual excitement.

It is with *Emblem I* and *Emblem II* that the full force of Falkenstein's exploration of space materializes. *Traveler* and *Signal* teach us the vocabulary with which we can understand the spatial relationships that are expressed in the later works.

D.H.



Wind Machine

No. 16

Wind Machine

1978 Canvas, copper, bamboo, 6.6'x8'

Space for Falkenstein is not designed to be static and contained, but to move. With the *Wind Machine*, the final work in this group of bamboo, copper, and linen structures, she directly expresses the infinite quality of space relationships within the universe by adding wheels to the truss structure and transforming the linen into a sail. If the viewer has felt overwhelmed while exploring these works and trying to grasp the concepts of topological space relationships, the *Wind Machine* makes all clear. The playful quality of this piece reenforces the simplicity of Falkenstein's message.

The exploration of space relationships that begins with the undulating forms of Traveler evolves in *Wind Machine* into an extension of space beyond all boundaries by the real possibility of movement. The hard-edged black painted forms that serve as a unifying force in this group are softened in the *Wind Machine*. They bleed into natural canvas as if the pigment had been scattered by the wind. *Wind Machine* is a lighter and more direct manifestation of Falkenstein's exploration of movement in space, while remaining true to the topological space relationships in the *Never Ending Screen* and the "sign" in the truss structure.

This group of works illustrates the power of the artist as a creator of form. If one finds a non-western quality to the group it is not because the artist was directly influenced by Oceanic or Pacific Island cultures, for example, but because she is part of a multi-cultural link that creates form from natural materials molded by abstract ideas. The concept for these pieces stems from her earlier explorations of space and becomes a more complete and pure development of those ideas. With these works the metaphor of the universe takes on new richness and complexness.

D.H.

Plexus, Connections, and *Expanding the Universe*

These paintings, executed consecutively in 1983, take on aspects of relief sculpture since smaller canvases have been applied to larger ones. This non-traditional format first appeared in *Plexus* and was a "serendipity" for Falkenstein. Falkenstein had begun working on the smaller canvas, but as her concept outgrew its limited dimensions she moved onto the larger canvas. In the next two paintings, three smaller canvases were initially applied to a larger canvas with the intention of giving them extra force, but still having the big canvas remain the main component. Some of the smaller canvases were actually painted eight years earlier.

The juxtaposition of linear and organic forms present in these paintings derives from Claire Falkenstein's formal vocabulary, first invented in the assemblages in the 1940s. Unlike those early constructions, here the paint unites both elements into a single unit.

The concept of space in these works is the same that Falkenstein utilizes in her sculpture. This space flows and expands and penetrates objects without isolating them.

E.L.

Plexus

No. 17

Plexus

1983 Acrylic on canvas, bamboo, galvanized iron, 3'x3'

Plexus is a painting with found objects of galvanized iron and bamboo, in addition to the smaller canvases, incorporated onto the larger one. The relief of the canvas and the three-dimensional pieces of iron and bamboo are all treated as if they were part of the two dimensional surface. This technique continues the artist's exploration of the ambiguities between two and three dimensions.

The color of *Plexus* is highly saturated, dominated by warm colors of orange and yellow. A large area of the left-hand side of the painting is a mixture of deep blues and greens which cause this part to recede. The bottom portion of the piece contains earth tones which also recede in comparison to the bright colors above. Color is not applied in simple, unmodulated fashion. The variety of colors seen throughout the surface suggests a layering of paint in its application.

Organic forms are painted in the center of the picture and are defined by black outlines. These strange forms are actually the jostled letters P-L-E-X-U-S, which is the key to the symbolism in this image. "Plexus" refers to a structure in the form of a network, an interlacing of parts. This painting represents the nerve center of the human body; the predominantly warm colors are meant to suggest the warmth of the body.

E.L.

No. 18

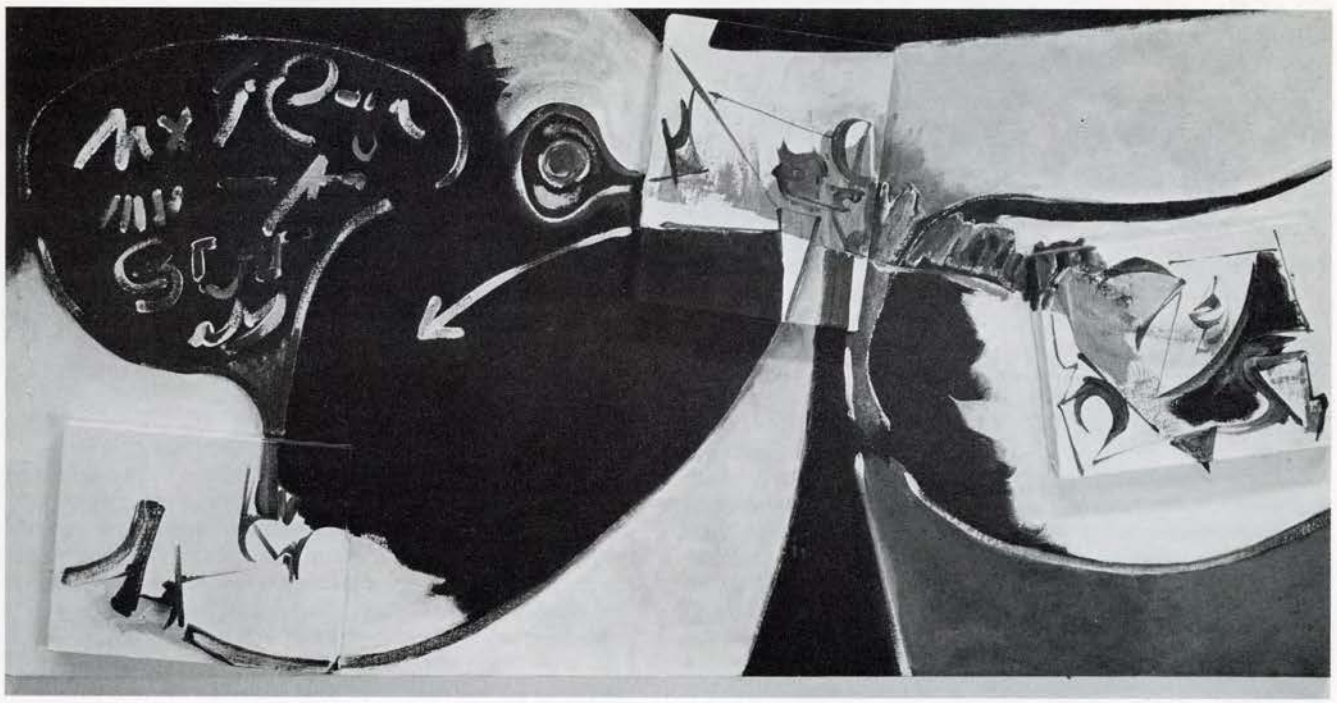
Connections

1983 Acrylic on canvas, 4'x2'

In *Connections* large areas of space are flattened and simplified into solid planes of black, white, or gray. The canvas is bisected vertically into two major units connected at the top by a series of small portions of various colors. The right section, slightly smaller than the left, is filled with organic shapes floating closely together in white space. The left section contains a series of symbols enclosed in a bubble surrounded by the darkness of the ultimate space—the universe. Curving lines, mostly created by the borders between contrasting areas of light and dark, direct the viewer's eye across the canvas in sequential movement. The most blatant of these linear elements is the white arrow set against a black field.

Connections is about communication systems—speech, gesture, and mental telepathy. The dominant black and white colors are intentionally cursive, like calligraphy. Because of its ambiguity, *Connections* can be "read" in various ways. One possible interpretation can view the image as a depiction of the right and left sides of the brain, i.e. the verbal vs. the non-verbal.

E.L.



Connections

Expanding the Universe

No. 19

Expanding the Universe

1983 Acrylic on canvas, 3.75'x4'

Expanding the Universe is created on a larger scale than the previous two paintings. This increased size is more characteristic of Falkenstein's paintings. The center of the painting consists of a large white bubble coming out of a small spigot-like form located in the top left portion of the painting. Attached to the spigot is a little knob to turn it off and on. The bubble appears to have expanded as it was released through the spigot. This is a humorous painting—a parody on Falkenstein's concept of "expanding space" released from a celestial faucet.

As in *Connections* black and white are again dominant colors. Here, however, the colors are more modulated, to give a sense of open space. The transformation from black to violet to pink suggests the firmament as one enters into the earth's atmosphere.

Plexus, Connections, and *Expanding the Universe* take us from an enclosed area inside the center of the human anatomy to a larger section similar to that of the brain, and then out into the broadest reaches of the universe. Although these paintings were created chronologically and in a few months time, their themes are totally unrelated. They were not meant to be seen as a series or group. However these pieces do have a common bond. Each describes a spatial environment related to a contemporary world.

E.L.

From Sign to Symbol

No. 20

From Sign to Symbol

1984 Acrylic on canvas, 6.25'x4.5'

From Sign to Symbol, painted in 1984, is divided into two main parts. The right side and lower left portions are filled with symbols in red, green, turquoise, brown, gray, or, most frequently, gold. These calligraphic shapes, which often recur in Falkenstein's work, are separated here, giving them an appearance similar to Japanese Katakana writing. The symbols float freely in the vast white space of the canvas.

The upper left portion of the canvas consists of a group of parallel diagonal lines of the same colors as the symbols, reminiscent of Jasper Johns' painting of the late '70s. The colors of the lines are systematically organized. Starting from the top, they are painted in natural colors of brown, mustard, and green. As they descend they include gray, and further down come alive with red and blue. At the bottom these lines include all the colors in the field of the symbols plus two new colors—blue and tan.

A break in these striations creates the form of an enlarged symbol which has been isolated from the rest by the colorful lines. This symbol, however, is filled with smaller signs which unite it to the others. The repetition of similar colors throughout the painting, unified by the overall white background, creates the impression of a homogeneous field of color.

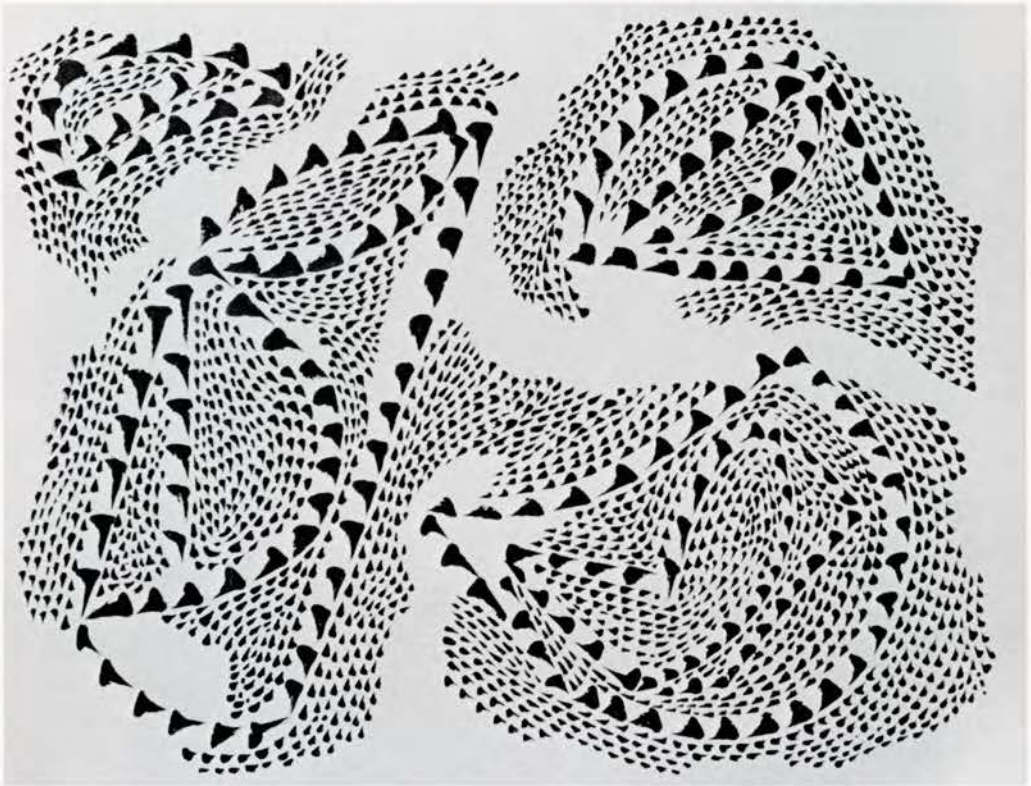
The region of the striations is differentiated from that of the floating symbols by an area of white space that varies in width from approximately one to five inches, this is a transitional, neutral zone.

Among the colorful symbols, no two alike, is one that stands out from the rest. In the extreme lower right corner is a symbol which is actually an "F" and a "C" fused together. It is the artist's signature.

The space in this painting appears flat due to the lack of modeling and overlapping of objects. However, the floating, curving symbols reinforce the idea that this is the same universal space of curvature and movement that is seen throughout Falkenstein's *oeuvre*.

From Sign to Symbol has a simpler composition than *Plexus, Connections,* and *Expanding the Universe*. Nothing has been attached to this canvas, as in the 1983 paintings, and much of the surface has been left white. This simplicity, combined with the bouncing movement of the signs, the diagonal lines, and the brightness of the colors, is a joyous image. Like a flag waving brightly, the work conveys a spirit of optimism.

E.L.



Moving Point Drawing

No. 21 through No. 29

Moving Point Drawings

1965-1980 Ink on paper, 1.5'x2'

The drawings included in this exhibition are a small selection from the extensive series which Falkenstein has created based on the concept of the "moving point." These images unequivocally demonstrate the virtuosity of Falkenstein's draftsmanship. Varying in size, form, and content, the drawings in this series are all composed of an accumulation of small units, or "points," which are most frequently created with black ink on white paper. (One exception is drawn in white ink on black paper.) Few artists have managed to achieve such a diversity of meaning and variety of expression out of the most basic and neutral unit of marking, the simple point, without forming it into recognizable imagery.

At least two interpretations of these works present themselves. They may be perceived as the visible depiction of a traced path of a few moving points, buzzing speedily through space in irregular patterns. The drawing, in this interpretation, represents the trace of the moving point as it progresses from one spot to the next. Alternatively, one can interpret each point as a discrete object of indeterminate size and character moving in space in a flock or school. One can imagine the points as sub-atomic particles, whizzing about in infinitesimally small, microscopic distances, propelled by magnetic fields of force, or as much larger units of matter, meteors, floating through cosmic space.

Whether one perceives these images as the traced patterns of a few objects or the depiction of a flock of things, they are intended to be understood as "in motion." The organic, swirling patterns move like currents of water. In her fascination with the depiction of objects in motion, Falkenstein confronts a central problem of twentieth century art. From the Futurist ex-

plorations, through Calder's mobiles, to Rickey's balanced vectors, the dynamism of Bergson's "flux vital" has been a central concern of many twentieth century artists. The static immutability of the art object has been abandoned as irrelevant to the modern era.

These drawings exhibit an impressive level of diversity and ingenuity within the self-imposed restrictions of the concept of the moving point. In number 21, Falkenstein creates an active, all-over field of evenly spaced and uniformly scaled points moving in fluid patterns. The uniform texture of number 21 is opened up with some negative spaces in number 22. In three of the drawings, numbers 23, 24, and 25, two sizes of points are juxtaposed. The larger points subdivide the smaller ones, creating defined forms. The cone shape of number 25 evokes associations with a tornado or a whirlpool of water. The direct spontaneous energy of the shapes in number 27 (which are no longer "points") comes as a surprise and a release of tension. The reversal of figure/ground relationships in number 28 is visually compelling. As white ink on black paper, the moving point acquires a ghost-like alter ego of greater delicacy and insubstantiality.

The creation of these drawings involves a remarkable amount of technical control. The use of pen and ink, as in Japanese calligraphy, demands an intense concentration of the artist's physical and mental resources. Falkenstein describes this internal control as deriving from the "plexus," i.e. the center of the body's voluntary and involuntary functions. These drawings reveal a further permutation of Falkenstein's continuing vision of the limitless universe.

W.S.